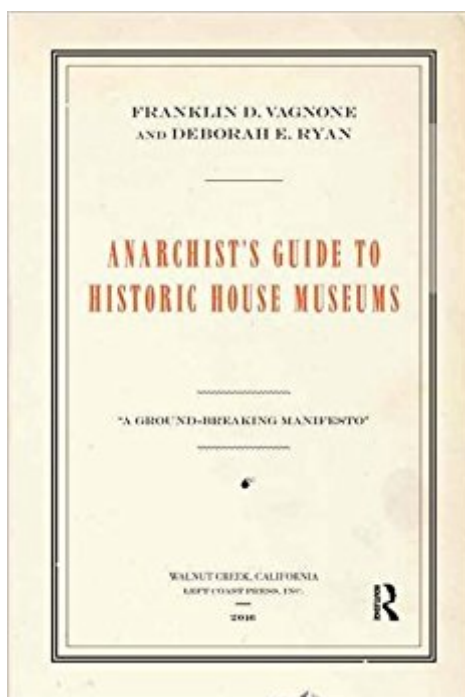


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# Anarchist's Guide To Historic House Museums



## Synopsis

In these days of an aging traditional audience, shrinking attendance, tightened budgets, increased competition, and exponential growth in new types of communication methods, America's house museums need to take bold steps and expand their overall purpose beyond those of the traditional museum. They need not only to engage the communities surrounding them, but also to collaborate with visitors on the type and quality of experience they provide. This book is a groundbreaking manifesto that calls for the establishment of a more inclusive, visitor-centered paradigm based on the shared experience of human habitation. It draws inspiration from film, theater, public art, and urban design to transform historic house museums while providing a how-to guide for making historic house museums sustainable, through five primary themes: communicating with the surrounding community, engaging the community, re-imagining the visitor experience, celebrating the detritus of human habitation, and acknowledging the illusion of the shelter's authenticity. *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums* offers a wry, but informed, rule-breaking perspective from authors with years of experience and gives numerous vivid examples of both good and not-so-good practices from house museums in the U.S.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Let me be clear (where have we heard that before?). I am neither an academic nor a museum professional and only came across this book by accident. However, as a layman I'm very much interested in museums in general, including historic houses and communities, of which my wife and

I have visited many and worked for both as a professional (my wife, as a history museum exhibit and program director) and volunteer (myself, as an art museum docent). Let's also be clear that the Guide is not a comprehensive "how-to" on running historic houses. Most notably it does not deal with financial issues or with mission concepts, at least not directly. Rather, focus is on the "visitor experience" and how to draw audiences to historic houses. If I had to pick one phrase to describe what the authors think of most historic house operations today, it would be "too anal" (as borrowed from Freud). The heart of this small book is 132 pages of practical thinking and examples of how to make historic houses more attractive and welcoming to visitors, both by reaching out to the communities in which they live, and by providing memorable experiences to their clients (visitors). Those pages are book-ended by sections that formalize the authors' approach, yet overall the writing and ideas are readily accessible to those outside the academy, for whom the book has obviously been written. The authors point out that historic houses are seeing declining visitor numbers, and their purpose is to help these institutions reverse that trend. They also admit that while some of their ideas are research-based, others are mere conjecture, and they invite the museum community to contribute to their ongoing "anarchist" project.

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